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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to analyze and compare the reading interests of adults from three educational levels. Fourteen adults in a community college reading center, 20 adults from various professional occupations, and 23 adults from a reading education class were given a reading interest inventory concerned with their reading habits and preferences and with the types of television and movies they watched. A comparison of the results from each group showed many similarities. Most adults tended to read between one and three magazine titles regularly and were interested in current events. A significant portion of each group--except the reading center group--read a newspaper every day, with each group favoring the front page. The reading class and professional group members had each read approximately three books per person just prior to the study, while book reading was apparently not popular with the reading center group. Motion picture and television program preference appeared to be similar across the three groups, with most subjects attending movies regularly for entertainment, escape, and to watch a good story. Information and entertainment were listed as primary reasons for television viewing. As the educational level of the adults in this study increased, they read a greater quantity as well as a greater variety of material. (HTH)

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Reading Interest Patterns of Adults at Three Educational Levels

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Abstract

A review of the literature indicated a need for empirical comparisons among adults within and between different educational levels. A reading interest inventory was completed by 57 adults at three levels of education: a community college reading center class, a professional group, and a reading education class. Individual group results and group comparisons are presented. Conclusions were that adults are similar in their reading of current material and their reading for information and pleasure. Educational level appears to determine the amount and type and variety of material read. Results are discussed in terms of adult education.

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Running Head: Adult Interest

LeGrand-Brodsky (8) indicates that the majority of adult Americans are avid book readers while a smaller percentage read magazines and newspapers only. Their interests vary greatly and often are a result of personality, experience, level of education and socio-economic status (5, 4, 9, 11).

The importance of reading interests and attitudes as an influence on adult learning has been well documented by Bettelheim (2), Arron and Miller (1), Smith, Drummond, and Pinette (12) and Steinberg (13). This literature indicates that interest and practice brings favorable results in reading.

An intensive review of this literature revealed a need for a comparison among adults within and between different educational levels. The purpose of this study was to analyze and compare the reading interests of adults within three educational levels.

Procedure

Sample

Three groups of adult readers participated in the study: adults enrolled in a reading center at a community college, adults working in professional capacities, and adults in an education class designed to teach participants to teach reading. Adults in the reading center program in the community college had finished at least eleven grades of schooling. The mean

age of the 14 adults was 24.64 (standard deviation of 6.59). Their occupations included student, cartoonist, and real estate agent. The occupations of the 22 adults who were professionals were teachers, secretaries, businessmen, registered nurses, administrators, and higher education professors. Their mean age was 35.5 (standard deviation of 8.87) and their educational level was at least a baccalaureate degree. Two adults held doctorates. Twenty-three adults in an education class at a university participated. Four were completing their baccalaureate degrees and 19 their masters degrees. Their mean age was 30.55 (standard deviation of 6.7).

Instrument and Method

The interest reading inventory was an adaptation of an inventory which was developed for secondary students (3). It consisted of 12 questions concerned with the reading of magazines, newspapers and books, with the amount of influence others extended on the volunteers' reading, and with types of movies and television programs watched. The latter questions were asked in order to determine type and quality of reading material versus type and quantity of television and movie viewing. The instrument was reviewed by reading teachers and professors of reading and was pilot tested.

Sixty-five adults, twenty in two groups and 25 in the reading class group, were asked by the investigators to complete the inventory. Fifty-seven (87.7%) were returned: 23 in the reading class, 20 in the professional group, and 14 in the reading center class. All adults voluntarily participated in this study and completed the inventory on their own time.

Results

Responses of each group are presented separately. A comparison among groups is presented last (see Tables 1 and 2).

Reading Center Participants

Of the 14 adults in the reading center of the community college twelve read at least three magazines. These included weekly news magazines, people oriented magazines, and business and sports magazines. The reasons given for these choices were: "let's you know what's happening," "escape from the real world," and "convenience." Nine adults did not read the newspaper every day. However, of these, two read it sometimes during the week. Those who read the newspaper read the front page, the sports and the movie section in that order.

Eight of the 14 participants read approximately two books each over the past several months. The most popular was non-fiction: Future Shock, Luther, Birth Conrol Effect. Fantasy reading such as Star Trek and horror stories such as The Body Snatchers were next. Harlequin Romances ranked third. If more time to read were available, nine indicated they would read fiction for pleasure and some non-fiction for self improvement. The adults in the college reading center indicated that friends and family, greatly influenced their reading choices but that friends made the most suggestions. Most stated that they read for information.

Thirteen went regularly to the movies. The type of movie most enjoyed was science fiction, adventures, cartoons, true to life stories,

and "off-the-wall" movies (Monty Python, Woody Allan, etc.). Most went to the movies to be entertained, to escape, and to see good film production.

Favorite television shows included news programs, interviews, variety and situation comedy, and science fiction fantasy. Most participants gave no reasons as to why they chose the shows they did. Those who provided reasons stated information about the world and escape from the daily tedium were why the shows were chosen.

Professional

The 20 adults in the professions read a total of 52 magazines, eight professional journals, and 15 entertainment magazines. The most common reasons given were: interesting, provactive, "keep me up-to-date."

Twelve of the adults read the newspaper every day. For the majority the front page news was read first, then the editorials, and finally the sports section, comic strips, society news, and entertainment.

All except three adults read two or more books during the past several months. A total of 42 books were read; 17 were non-fiction and 25 were fiction. The non-fiction category included self-help books, biographies, and history.

Most (15) indicated that if they had time, they would read at least one additional book. Of the thirty additional books listed, 14 were fiction, and 16 nonfiction. The reasons given for selection were: interest, pleasure, the author, recommended by a friend, need to grow and understand relationships. Friend, family teachers gave suggestions as to what to was

read and appeared to be very influential. Most of the adults indicated they read for pleasure, information and self improvement. Reading for problem solving and escape came last.

Of the 20 adults who participated, 18 went to the movies. Their first choice was adventures, followed by "off-the-wall" (Monty Python type) and science fiction movies. Movies that received the least votes were horror, war stories and cartoons. The major reasons these adults went to their favorite movie was: for escape, to watch a good story, to be entertained, and for information.

Favorite television viewing by 17 of the adults included news programs, light drama, situation comedy, and adventure. The most common reasons for watching such programs were: information, entertainment, and good production.

Reading Education Class

The entire group of 23 adults read from two to three magazines often. The most common were news (Time, Newsweek) and historical (National Geographic, Smithsonian) magazines. Others included professional journals, women's magazines, and magazines of special interest such as Dog World. Information was the primary reason given for reading these magazines while entertainment ranked second.

The majority (14) read the newspaper every day. The front page news was read first; then the editorial, entertainment and movie section, comics and society news followed in that order.

Twenty one read at least two books during the past several months for a total of 46 books. Eleven were non-fiction; four of these were

text books. If these adults had more time, they indicated that they would read more fiction. Thirty-seven additional fiction and 17 non-fictional books were listed. The reasons given for reading these books were for enjoyment and for information. Three adults indicated they would not read more and one of these three indicated that s/he "hadn't condidered pleasure reading lately."

These adults stated that friends influenced their reading matter and made the most suggestions. Most of the participants indicated that they read for self improvement, pleasure and information.

Choice in movies indicated that adventure and love stories rated highly. True-to-life stories and mysteries followed next. Off-the-wall and science fiction movies rated third. The majority (20) of the participants went to the movies to be entertained and to watch a "good" story. Others went to see good acting and to escape.

A total of 37 different television shows were listed as favorites. The majority of the shows (26) were situation comedy, mystery, or movies. Eleven were news and interview programs, such as, Good Morning America, 60 minutes, and PBS specials. The reasons given for watching television were for information and entertainment. Four adults in this group indicated they did not watch television and would rather read.

Comparisons

In comparing the groups, it appears they are similar to one another. Most adults tend to read between one and three magazines and are interested in current events. The differences are in the choice of magazines to

provide information and enjoyment. Community college reading students tend to read, Omni, National Enquirer, Newsweek, High Times, Working Mother, Business World, Playboy, and Husky. The professional group selected others: National Geographic, New Yorker, Atlantic Monthly, Scientific American, Sunset, Smithsonian and professional journals. Reading education students showed a similar listing as the professional group and add woman's magazines.

Insert Table 1

A significant porportion of each group except the reading center group read the newspaper every day. In each group, the front page is the most favored with the editorial and sports page following closely.

Book reading behavior shows a marked difference among groups. The reading class and the professional group each read about 3 books per person. Apparently, book reading is not popular in the community college reading center group. All the adults who read books stated they did so for enjoyment, and information. Some indicated reading for self-improvement was a high priority. Each group also indicated that friends and family influenced them in their selection of reading material.

Kind and type of motion picture and television viewing appeared to be similar across the three groups. Typical reasons for movie attendance was: entertainment, escape and to watch a good story. Information and entertainment were listed as primary reasons for television viewing.

Insert Table 2

Conclusions

Although the sample size of the groups was small, drawing some conclusions across groups may clarify further the issues concerning adult interests:

1. The adults in this study tend to be similar in their reading of current material. All read some magazines and most read the front page of the newspaper.

2. Most of the adults in this study read for information, enjoyment and self improvement.

3. Friends and family are influencial to the adults in this study. Apparently, they suggest much of the reading material.

4. Most of the adults in this study viewed television for similar reasons: information and entertainment, and went to the movies for equally similar reasons: entertainment and escape. The kinds of programs that satisfy these needs tend to vary between groups.

5. Educational level appears to determine the amount of material as well as the type of material read.

Discussion

The results of this study and the conclusions drawn appear to provide empirical support to the experiences and studies reported by Gutherie (4), Mikulecky and Shanklin (9) and Smith, Drummond and Pinette (12). Each author discussed adults' uniqueness in preference and the variables inherent in the selection of reading materials.

The most noteworthy aspect of this study is that it provided support to two assumptions in adult education as proposed by Knox (7): 1) interest involves a choice among alternatives which are familiar; and 2) education enables an adult to have more alternatives to choose among. As the educational level of the adults in this study increased, the adults read a greater quantity as well as greater variety of material. The reading material was selected from familiar alternatives to which the educative process had exposed the adults. This is especially true for the adults practicing professions. The number of professional journals read accounted for 8% of all magazines they read.

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TABLE 1

TYPE OF READER INTEREST IN READING MATERIAL

Reading Material

Readers

	Magazines		Newspapers		Books	
	Average Number	Type	Average Number	Page	Average Number	Type
Reading Class (23)	2-3	news historical special interest	14 (.60)	front page editorial movie	2-3	37F* 17NF*
Professional (20)	1-3	professional entertainment news	12 (.60)	front page editorial sports	2+	25F 17NF
Reading	1-3	news business sports	5 (.57)	front page sports movies	1+	9F 7NF

* Fiction
**Non-fiction

TABLE 2

TYPE OF READER INTEREST IN VIEWING MATERIAL

Viewing

Readers	Movies		Television	
	Number	Kind	Number	Kind
Reading Class (23)	26	adventure love stories true-to-life	19	sit. com. mystery movies news interview
Professional (20)	18	adventure off-the-wall science fiction	17	news light drama sit. com. adventure
Reading Center (14)	13	science fiction adventures cartoons true-to-life off-the-wall	13	news interviews variety sit. com.